

75th Street rail project hits a Trump bump

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Greg Hinz on
Politics



The beleaguered project to unsnarl railroad traffic in Chicago's 75th street corridor has suffered another setback, further delaying hopes of ever moving freight trains through town without hours and sometimes days of delay.

But the situation might not be as bad as it appears, depending on the political climate next winter.

The bad news came when the Trump administration announced it was deferring action on a pending application from the Illinois Department of Transportation for about \$160 million for the first phase of [the \\$1 billion 75th Street Corridor Improvement Project](#) of new bridges, flyovers, track and improvements along 75th, between Halsted and Western. The project is part of the larger Create program to ease Chicago-area congestion woes.

The U.S. Department of Transportation said it will hold almost all funding under the program IDOT wants to tap until next year, and issue new criteria on what it's looking for.

IDOT and other local officials had been hopeful of getting money under an application they submitted last fall, and U.S. Sens. Dick Durbin and Tammy Duckworth, both Illinois Democrats, are expressing concern about the new delay.

"President Trump promised a trillion-dollar infrastructure package, but instead his budget slashed transportation investments and his administration continues to delay funding," Durbin said.

But the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning is hopeful.

"While of course disappointed federal funding for the 75th St. project isn't imminent, we are also encouraged that the

pot for freight will be bigger overall," when the feds effectively combine two years of spending into one big package next year, said CMAP Executive Director Joseph Szabo.

"Create should benefit as the new criteria—at least on paper—emphasize the need for private investments, a big local commitment, and benefits to the national freight system."

A third official who has closely followed [the 75th Street saga](#), Southwest Side congressman Dan Lipinski, D-Chicago, said he, too is "disappointed," but "sort of understand(s) why" the Trump people want to put their stamp on the program. President Barack Obama's administration could have made the awards last fall but held the decision for Trump, he noted.

The real question is whether the awards will be based on the new criteria or political factors, Lipinski said. With costs of the overall 75th Street project being split roughly in thirds among the state, federal government and railroads, "the application should have an even better shot" at approval, he said.

The new applications will be due this fall, with winners likely to be announced in the first quarter of 2018.